



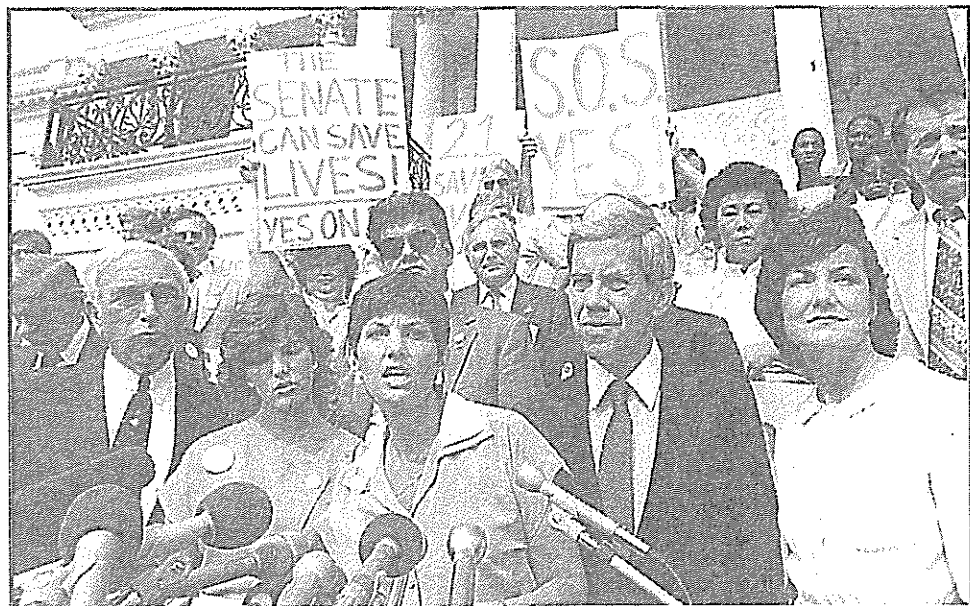
## Chapter 16

# PACs and Interest Groups

### *Consider As You Read*

- What are interest groups, and what role do they play in government?
- How do lobbyists influence lawmakers?
- In what ways do interest groups both help and harm the nation?

Candy Lightner decided to do all she could to keep drunk drivers off the roads after her daughter was killed by a drunk driver. Through the group she started, called Mothers Against Drunk Drivers, or M.A.D.D., Lightner worked for stricter laws to prevent drunk driving in her state of California. Since people across the nation contributed money to M.A.D.D., the organization had the money it needed to pay for television commercials and education programs to stop drunk driving. M.A.D.D. also influenced Congress to pass stricter laws to stop people from driving while drunk. Through M.A.D.D., Candy Lightner found a way to make her voice heard in American government.



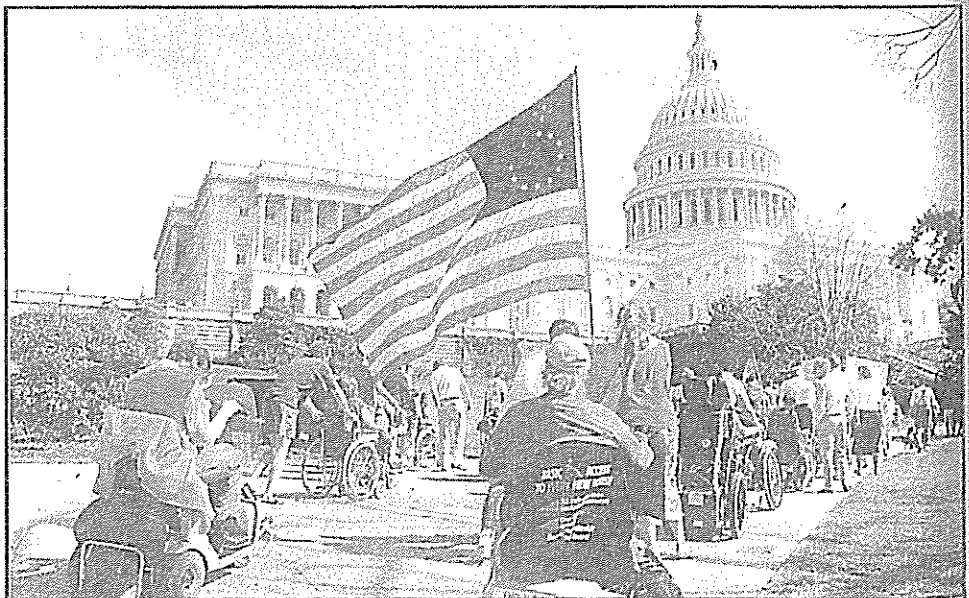
*Candy Lightner started M.A.D.D., an interest group to stop drunk driving.*

## The Purpose of Interest Groups

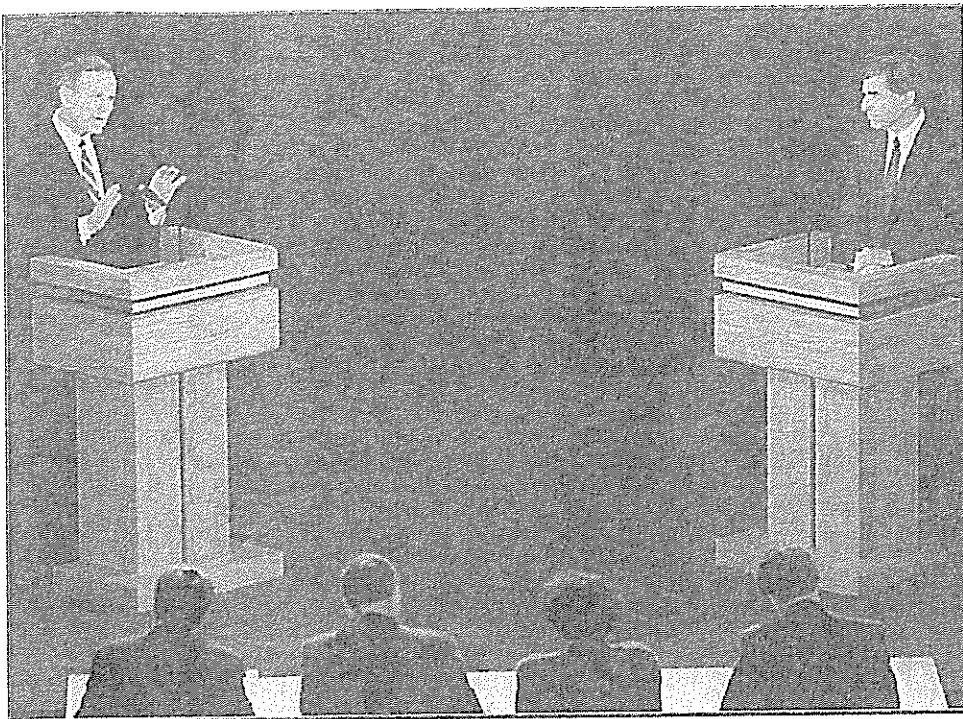
M.A.D.D. is just one of the many interest groups in the nation. Interest groups are organizations that people form in order to get laws passed that benefit the interests of the people they represent. For example, the Friends of the Earth interest group works for people who want to protect plants and animals. It pressures lawmakers to pass laws that keep land safe for wildlife. Interest groups usually work for only those issues that are of interest to their own members.

## Different Types of Interest Groups

The nation's many interest groups can be divided into three types of groups. The first and largest group is based on business activity. Business groups include labor unions, farm groups, and professional organizations. These interest groups work to make sure their business can grow and continue to make money. These interest groups often provide other kinds of services to their members. These services can include medical care and programs to improve professional knowledge and job skills. For example, an interest group called the American Medical Association pressures the government to pass laws that are helpful to doctors. It also publishes magazines to help doctors learn about the newest kinds of medicine.



*People with disabilities marched to the Capitol in 1990 to speak out for equal rights.*



*The League of Women Voters holds debates to inform voters.*

The second type of interest group is based on issues that concern the members. These groups try to influence the government to support their ideas. The Friends of the Earth is one such interest group. Sometimes these interest groups and ones that serve businesses have different goals. The Friends of the Earth may want to protect a certain piece of land, while the local Chamber of Commerce may want to build a mall there.

Public interest groups are the third type of group. These groups work for the interest of all people instead of serving the special interests of certain groups. The League of Women Voters is an example of a public interest group. This organization encourages every citizen to register and vote in all elections. Since the League believes that informed citizens make wise choices when voting, the group provides information about candidates from all parties before elections. It also organizes debates in which candidates can discuss their platforms.

### **How Do Interest Groups Influence Government?**

Interest groups hire people who work to influence members of Congress and the executive branch. These professionals **lobby** government leaders in three ways. First, lobbyists bring information to members of Congress. They hope their

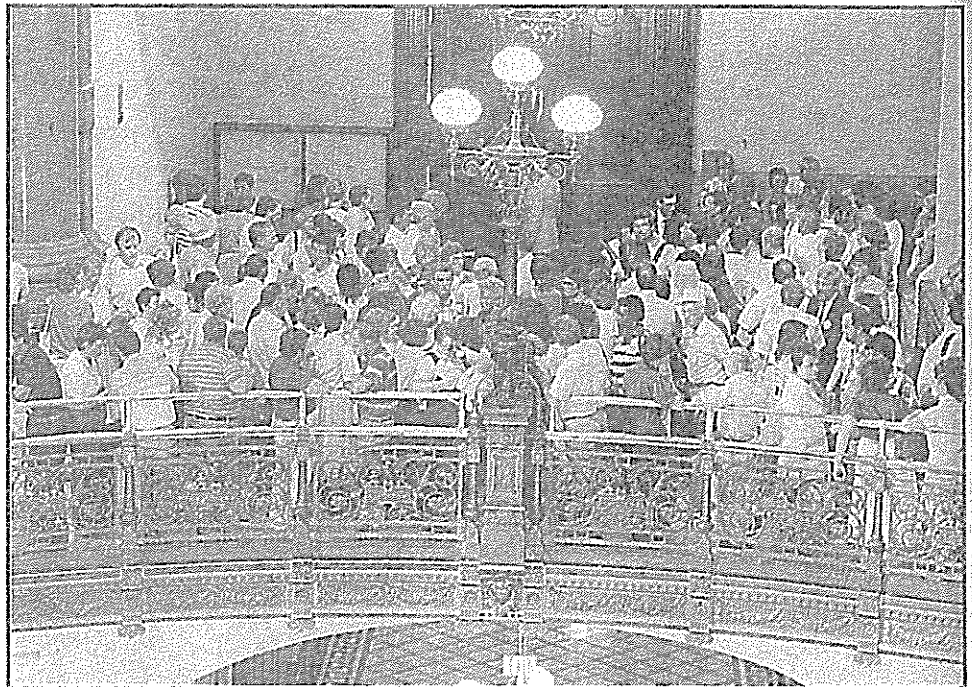
**lobby**  
work to influence  
lawmakers

information will convince Congress to pass laws that are important to their interest groups. Members of Congress depend on lobbyists to inform them, since they cannot know all the information about each of the thousands of bills they must vote on.

Second, interest groups use the media to get messages about their issue to the public. Newspaper advertisements, television commercials, and television interviews with government leaders influence public opinion about different issues. Lobbyists also write letters to the public explaining the issue. Lobbyists hope that once citizens know the facts, the citizens will write or call their members of Congress to pass laws that would be helpful.

Third, lobbyists provide information to the members of their interest group about the group's goals and programs. For example, the National Education Association publishes a newspaper with information about different kinds of teaching methods, problems teachers are facing, and proposed laws to help teachers. Lobbyists hope that informed members will urge their lawmakers to support the laws they need.

Lobbyists work hard to influence Congress as well as the President and the executive departments. Lobbyists are also active in state and local governments.



*Lobbyists work to influence government leaders.*

Congress has passed laws to limit lobbying so that interest groups will not gain too much control over government actions. The law requires lobbyists to provide correct information about their issue to congressional committees. They can use pressure to persuade lawmakers to pass laws for their interest groups. But they cannot use force or pay lawmakers to pass certain laws.

### **Why Do Interest Groups Form PACs?**

Interest groups want candidates to be elected who will act on their interests. To help candidates win elections, interest groups form political action committees, or PACs, that collect money for campaigns. PACs collect this money from members of their interest groups. There are now more than 4,000 PACs that contribute money to political campaigns.

Congress has limited the amount of money a PAC can contribute to a candidate's campaign fund. PACs cannot give more than \$5,000 to each campaign fund, but they can contribute to many candidates. A PAC can also run its own campaign for a candidate and spend as much as it wants for their campaign. A PAC can pay for its own television commercials, newsletters, and newspaper ads to help a candidate win votes.

### **Do Interest Groups Help the Government?**

Some people question whether or not interest groups help the nation. Some Americans believe they are harmful because certain interest groups try to pressure Congress into passing laws that are not good for the nation as a whole. Often senators and representatives feel they owe favors to PACs who contributed money to their campaign. They may pass laws to help the interest groups that supported them, even though those laws would not be the best for all people in the nation.

Other people believe interest groups are helpful to the nation. First, interest groups unite people who care about a common issue. We saw how Americans who want to stop drunk driving work together through M.A.D.D.

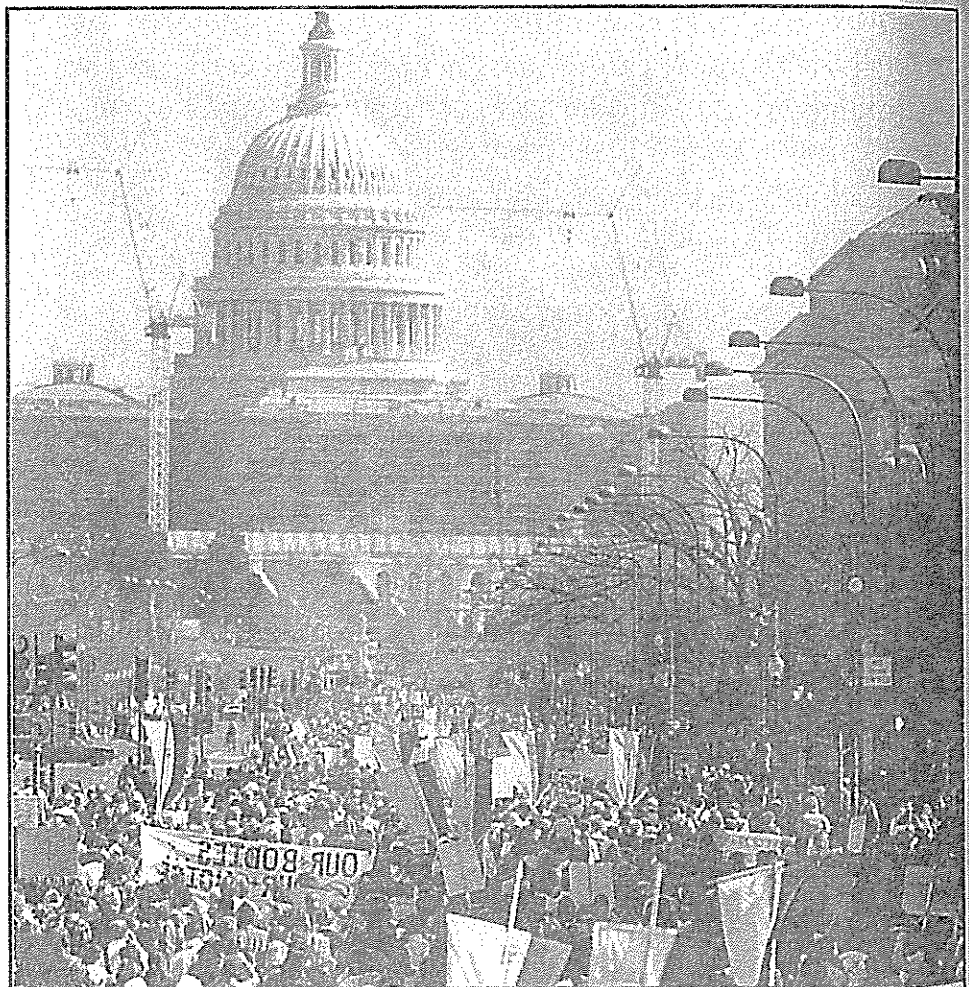
Second, interest groups are a source of special information for Congress. We saw that interest groups hire lobbyists who help members of Congress make decisions about bills.



discrimination  
unequal treatment

Finally, interest groups help the nation by influencing the development of new laws. The special interest group called the National Organization for Women, or N.O.W., is a good example of how a special interest group can help change laws and policies. Since N.O.W. was started in 1966, laws have been passed to prevent job **discrimination** against women. Other laws require men and women to receive equal pay for doing the same job. N.O.W. has encouraged women to enter elections at all levels of government.

Interest groups play a role in all levels of government as they influence both public opinion and the work of the lawmakers. Through PACs, interest groups affect the nation's elections. While many people question whether interest groups are good or bad for the nation, everyone agrees that these groups will continue to be an important part of the American system of government.



*In 1986, members of N.O.W. went to the Capitol to fight for equal rights.*



## Using What You Learned

### Comprehension — Write the Answer

Write one or more sentences to answer each question.

1. What are three types of interest groups, and how do they differ from each other?

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2. How are interest groups a way for citizens to be involved in government?

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3. What do you think are the two most important ways lobbyists can influence Congress? Why? \_\_\_\_\_

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4. Do you think Congress should limit lobbying? Why? \_\_\_\_\_

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5. How can PACs influence elections? \_\_\_\_\_

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6. Give two examples of how special interest groups have helped the nation.

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### Vocabulary — Exclusions

One word or phrase in each group does not belong. Find that word, and cross it out. Then write a sentence that tells how the other words are alike.

1. interest groups  
senators  
PACs  
lobbyists

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2. Friends of the Earth  
League of Women Voters  
Democratic Party  
National Education Association

3. newspaper ads  
television commercials  
television interviews  
letter writing

4. discriminate  
lobby  
pressure  
influence

Rev

The  
camp  
Dem  
grap

## Critical Thinking — Analogies

Use a word in the box to finish each sentence. You will not use all the words.

influence  
women's rights  
political party

N.O.W.  
public interest group  
PACs

wildlife  
media

1. The American Medical Association is to a business interest group as the League of Women Voters is to a \_\_\_\_\_.
2. Interest groups are to laws as \_\_\_\_\_ are to elections.
3. Campaign is to elect as lobby is to \_\_\_\_\_.
4. Safe highways are to M.A.D.D. as women's rights are to \_\_\_\_\_.
5. The American Medical Association is to doctors as Friends of the Earth is to \_\_\_\_\_.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

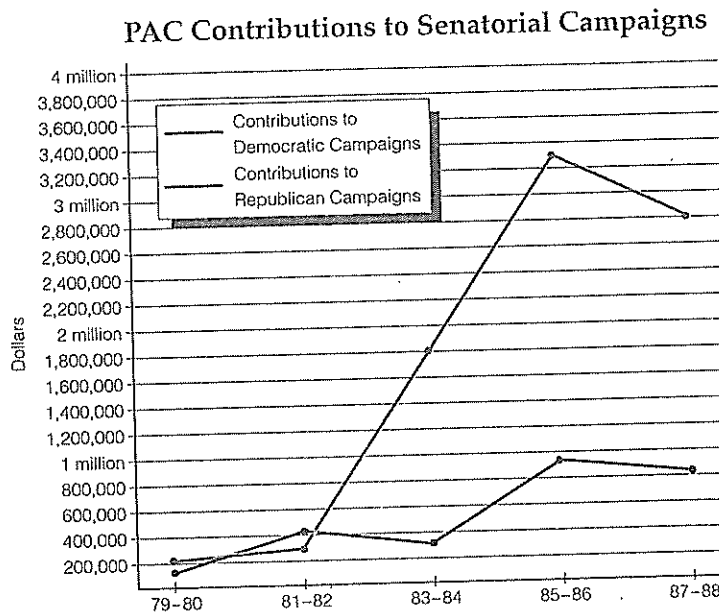
6.



# Skill Builder

## Reviewing Line Graphs

The line graph on this page shows trends in PAC contributions to senatorial campaigns from the years 1979–80 to 1987–88. One line represents contributions to the Democrats, and the other line represents contributions to the Republicans. Study the graph and answer the questions.



1. Which party has received less PAC money in most elections? In which years did that party receive more money than the other party? \_\_\_\_\_
2. In which years did the Republicans receive the most PAC money? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. In which years did the Democrats receive the most PAC money? \_\_\_\_\_
4. About how much more money did the Republicans receive than the Democrats in 1988? \_\_\_\_\_
5. Describe the trend between 1981–82 and 1985–86 in Republican PAC contributions.  
\_\_\_\_\_
6. How would you describe the trend from 1979–80 to 1987–88 in Democratic PAC contributions? \_\_\_\_\_